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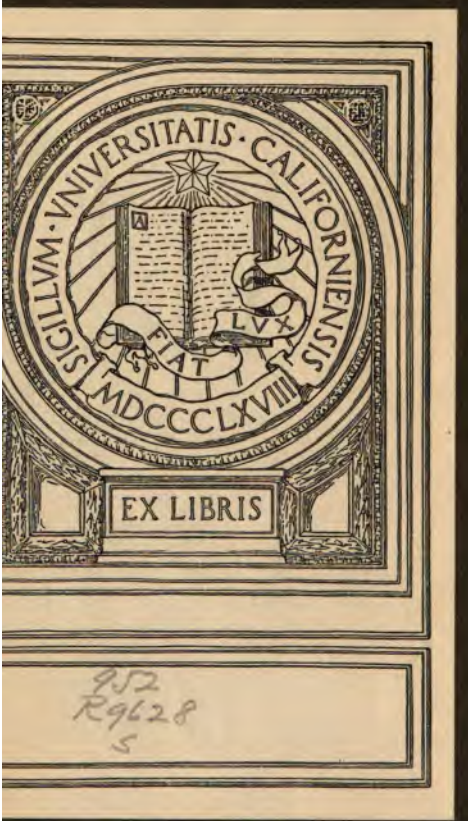
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NUMBER ONE

SOME IRISH ESSAYS BY A. E.

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CONTENTS.

NATIONALITY AND COSMOPOLITANISM IN ART 9
THE DRAMATIC TREATMENT OF HEROIC LITERATURE 21
ON AN IRISH HILL 28
THE POET OF SHADOWS 35

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The Dramatic Treatment of Heroic Literature appeared in *The United Irishman*, *Nationality and Cosmopolitanism in Art* in the *Daily Express*, *On An Irish Hill* in the *Kilkenny Moderator*, and *The Poet of Shadows* in *The Reader*.

PREFACE.

THE Editors of this series have asked my permission to reprint the four essays which follow. As I read them over I felt that life moves too quickly, and we can hardly write a word but it seems the moment after to refer only to a byegone age. Nature alone does not change, and the earliest of these essays *On an Irish Hill* is the only one which still means something to me. I cannot let *The Dramatic Treatment of Heroic Literature* be reprinted without saying that I feel now O'Grady was right, and I retain the essay only because of some compliment implied to the finest personality in contemporary Irish literature. *Nationality and Cosmopolitanism in Art* was the last essay in a forgotten controversey in which W. B. Yeats, John Eglinton, William Larminie and myself took part. The essay on Yeats was written while the poet was still trailing the clouds and sunrise colours with which he came, and before he had published the later dramatic works to which my fantastic reverie over his poetry has no application.

A. E.

NATIONALITY AND COSMOPOLITANISM IN ART.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

As one of those who believe that the literature of a country is for ever creating a new soul among its people, I do not like to think that literature with us must follow an inexorable law of sequence, and gain a spiritual character only after the bodily passions have grown weary and exhausted themselves. In the essay called *The Autumn of the Body* Mr. Yeats seems to indicate such a sequence. Yet, whether the art of any of the writers of the decadence does really express spiritual things is open to doubt. The mood in which their work is conceived, a distempered emotion, through which no new joy quivers, seems too often to tell rather of exhausted vitality than of the ecstacy of a new life. However much, too, their art refines itself, choosing ever rarer and more exquisite forms of expression, underneath it all an intuition seems to disclose only the old wolfish lust, hiding itself beneath the golden fleece of the spirit. It is not the spirit breaking through corruption, but the life of the senses longing to shine with the light which makes saintly things beautiful: and it would put on the jewelled raiment of seraphim, retaining still a heart of clay smitten through and through with the unappeasable desire of the flesh: so Rossetti's women, who have around them all the circumstance of poetry and romantic

beauty, seem through their sucked-in lips to express a thirst which could be allayed in no spiritual paradise. Art in the decadence in our time might be symbolized as a crimson figure undergoing a dark crucifixion: the hosts of light are overcoming it, and it is dying filled with anguish and despair at a beauty it cannot attain. All these strange emotions have a profound psychological interest. I do not think because a spiritual flaw can be urged against a certain phase of life that it should remain unexpressed. The psychic maladies which attack all races when their civilization grows old must needs be understood to be dealt with: and they cannot be understood without being revealed in literature or art. But in Ireland we are not yet sick with this sickness. As psychology it concerns only the curious. But in Ireland our intellectual life is in suspense. The national spirit seems to be making a last effort to assert itself in literature and to overcome cosmopolitan influences and the art of writers who express a purely personal feeling. It is true that nationality may express itself in many ways: it may not be at all evident in the subject matter, but may be very evident in the sentiment. But a literature loosely held together by some emotional characteristics common to the writers, however great it may be, does not fulfil the purpose of a literature or art created by a number of men who have a common

aim in building up an overwhelming ideal—who create, in a sense, a soul for their country, and who have a common pride in the achievement of all. The world has not seen this since the great antique civilizations of Egypt and Greece passed away. We cannot imagine an Egyptian artist daring enough to set aside the majestic attainment of many centuries. An Egyptian boy as he grew up must have been overawed by the national tradition, and have felt that it was not to be set aside: it was beyond his individual rivalry. The soul of Egypt incarnated in him, and, using its immemorial language and its mysterious lines, the efforts of the least workman who decorated a tomb seem to have been directed by the same hand that carved the Sphinx. This adherence to a traditional form is true of Greece, though to a less extent. The little Tanagra terra-cottas might have been done by Phidias, and in literature Ulysses and Agamemnon were not the heroes of one epic, but appeared endlessly in epic and drama. Since the Greek civilization no European nation has had an intellectual literature which was genuinely national. In the present century, leaving aside a few things in outward circumstance, there is little to distinguish the work of the best English writers or artists from that of their continental contemporaries: Millais, Leighton, Rossetti, Turner—how different from each other, and yet they might

have painted the same pictures as born Frenchmen, and it would not have excited any great surprise as a marked divergence from French art. The cosmopolitan spirit, whether for good or for evil, is hastily obliterating all distinctions. What is distinctly national in these countries is less valuable than the immense wealth of universal ideas; and the writers who use this wealth appeal to no narrow circle: the foremost writers, the Tolstois and Ibsens, are conscious of addressing a European audience.

If nationality is to justify itself in the face of all this, it must be because the country which preserves its individuality does so with the profound conviction that its peculiar ideal is nobler than that which the cosmopolitan spirit suggests—that this ideal is so precious to it that its loss would be as the loss of the soul, and that it could not be realised without an aloofness from, if not an actual indifference to, the ideals which are spreading so rapidly over Europe. Is it possible for any nationality to make such a defence of its isolation? If not, let us read Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoi, men so much greater than any we can show, try to absorb their universal wisdom, and no longer confine ourselves to local traditions. But nationality was never so strong in Ireland as at the present time. It is beginning to be felt, less as a political movement than as a spiritual force. It seems to be gathering itself together,

joining men who were hostile before, in a new intellectual fellowship: and if all these could unite on fundamentals, it would be possible in a generation to create a national ideal in Ireland, or rather to let that spirit incarnate fully which began among the ancient peoples, which has haunted the hearts and whispered a dim revelation of itself through the lips of the bards and peasant story-tellers.

Every Irishman forms some vague ideal of his country, born from his reading of history, or from contemporary politics, or from an imaginative intuition; and this Ireland in the mind it is, not the actual Ireland, which kindles his enthusiasm. For this he works and makes sacrifices; but because it has never had any philosophical definition, or a supremely beautiful statement in literature which gathered all aspirations about it, the ideal remains vague. This passionate love cannot explain itself; it cannot make another understand its devotion. To reveal Ireland in clear and beautiful light, to create the Ireland in the heart, is the province of a national literature. Other arts would add to this ideal hereafter, and social life and politics must in the end be in harmony. We are yet before our dawn, in a period comparable to Egypt before the first of her solemn temples constrained its people to an equal mystery, or to Greece before the first perfect statue had fixed an ideal of beauty which mothers dreamed of to mould their yet

unborn children. We can see, however, as the ideal of Ireland grows from mind to mind, it tends to assume the character of a sacred land. The Dark Rosaleen of Mangan expresses an almost religious adoration, and to a later writer it seems to be nigher to the spiritual beauty than other lands:

> "*And still the thoughts of Ireland brood*
> *Upon her holy quietude.*"

The faculty of abstracting from the land their eyes beheld another Ireland through which they wandered in dream, has always been a characteristic of the Celtic poets. This inner Ireland which the visionary eye saw was the Tir-na-nOge, the Country of Immortal Youth, for they peopled it only with the young and beautiful. It was the Land of the Living Heart, a tender name which showed that it had become dearer than the heart of woman, and overtopped all other dreams as the last hope of the spirit, the bosom where it would rest after it had passed from the fading shelter of the world. And sure a strange and beautiful land this Ireland is, with a mystic beauty which closes the eyes of the body as in sleep, and opens the eyes of the spirit as in dreams; and never a poet has lain on our hillsides but gentle, stately figures, with hearts shining like the sun, move through his dreams, over radiant grasses, in an enchanted world of their own: and it has become alive through every haunted

rath and wood and mountain and lake, so that we can hardly think of it otherwise than as the shadow of the thought of God. The last Celtic poet who has appeared shows the spiritual qualities of the first, when he writes of the grey rivers in their "enraptured" wanderings, and when he sees in the jewelled bow which arches the heavens

> "*The Lord's seven spirits that shine through the rain.*"

This mystical view of nature, peculiar to but one English poet, Wordsworth, is a national characteristic; and much in the creation of the Ireland in the mind is already done, and only needs retelling by the new writers. More important, however, for the literature we are imagining as an offset to the cosmopolitan ideal, would be the creation of heroic figures, types, whether legendary or taken from history, and enlarged to epic proportions by our writers, who would use them in common, as Cuculain, Fionn, Ossian, and Oscar were used by the generations of poets who have left us the bardic history of Ireland, wherein one would write of the battle fury of a hero, and another of a moment when his fire would turn to gentleness, and another of his love for some beauty of his time, and yet another tell how the rivalry of a spiritual beauty made him tire of love; and so from iteration and persistent dwelling on a few

heroes, their imaginative images found echoes in life, and other heroes arose, continuing their tradition of chivalry.

That such types are of the highest importance, and have the most ennobling influence on a country, cannot be denied. It was this idea led Whitman to exploit himself as the typical American. He felt that what he termed a "stock personality" was needed to elevate and harmonize the incongruous human elements in the States. English literature has always been more sympathetic with actual beings than with ideal types, and cannot help us much. A man who loves Dickens, for example, may grow to have a great tolerance for the grotesque characters which are the outcome of the social order in England, but he will not be assisted in the conception of a higher humanity: and this is true of very many English writers who lack a fundamental philosophy, and are content to take man, as he seems to be for the moment, rather than as the pilgrim of eternity—as one who is flesh to-day but who may hereafter grow divine, and who may shine at last like the stars of the morning, triumphant among the sons of God.

Mr. Standish O'Grady, in his notable epic of Cuculain, was in our time the first to treat the Celtic tradition worthily. He has contributed one hero who awaits equal comrades, if indeed the tales of the Red Branch do not

absorb the thoughts of many imaginative writers, and Cuculain remain the typical hero of the Gael, becoming to every boy who reads the story a revelation of what his own spirit is.

I know John Eglinton, one of our most thoughtful writers, our first cosmopolitan, thinks that "these ancient legends refuse to be taken out of their old environment." But I believe that the tales which have been preserved for a hundred generations in the heart of the people must have had their power, because they had in them a core of eternal truth. Truth is not a thing of to-day or to-morrow. Beauty, heroism, and spirituality do not change like fashion, being the reflection of an unchanging spirit. The face of faces which looks at us through so many shifting shadows has never altered the form of its perfection, since the face of man, made after its image, first looked back on its original:—

"*For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,*
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died."

These dreams, antiquities, traditions, once actual, living, and historical, have passed from the world of sense into the world of memory and thought: and time, it seems to me, has not taken away from their power, nor made them more remote from sympathy, but has rather purified them by removing them from

earth to heaven: from things which the eye can see and the ear can hear, they have become what the heart ponders over, and are so much nearer, more familiar, more suitable for literary use than the day they were begotten. They have now the character of symbol, and, as symbol, are more potent than history. They have crept through veil after veil of the manifold nature of man; and now each dream, heroism or beauty, has laid itself nigh the divine power it represents, the suggestion of which made it first beloved: and they are ready for the use of the spirit, a speech of which every word has a significance beyond itself, and Deirdre is, like Helen, a symbol of eternal beauty, and Cuculain represents as much as Prometheus the heroic spirit, the redeemer in man.

In so far as these ancient traditions live in the memory of man, they are contemporary to us as much as electrical science: for the images which time brings now to our senses, before they can be used in literature, have to enter into exactly the same world of human imagination as the Celtic traditions live in. And their fitness for literary use is not there determined by their freshness but by their power of suggestion. Modern literature, where it is really literature and not book-making, grows more subjective year after year, and the mind has a wider range over time than the physical nature has. Many things

live in it—empires which have never crumbled, beauty which has never perished, love whose fires have never waned: and, in this formidable competition for use in the artist's mind, to-day stands only its chance with a thousand days. To question the historical accuracy of the use of such memories is not a matter which can be rightly raised. The question is—do they express lofty things to the soul? If they do they have justified themselves.

I have written at some length on the two paths which lie before us, for we have arrived at a parting of ways. One path leads, and has already led many Irishmen to obliterate all nationality from their work. The other path winds upward to a mountain top of our own, which may be in the future the Mecca to which many worshippers will turn. To remain where we are as a people, indifferent to literature, to art, to ideas; wasting the precious gift of public spirit we possess so abundantly in the sordid political rivalries, without practical or ideal ends, is to justify those who have chosen the other path, and followed another star than ours. I do not wish anyone to infer from this a contempt for those, who, for the last hundred years, have guided public opinion in Ireland. If they failed in one respect, it was out of a passionate sympathy for wrongs of which many are memories, thanks to them, and to them is due the creation of a force which may be turned in other directions, not

without a memory of those pale sleepers to whom we may turn in thought, placing

"*A kiss of fire on the dim brow of failure,*
A crown upon her uncrowned head."

1899.

THE DRAMATIC TREATMENT OF HEROIC LITERATURE.

> "*The Red Branch ought not to be staged. . . . That literature ought not to be produced for popular consumption for the edification of the crowd. . . . I say to you drop this thing at your peril. . . . You may succeed in degrading Irish ideals, and banishing the soul of the land. . . . Leave the heroic cycles alone, and don't bring them down to the crowd. . .*" (STANDISH O'GRADY in *All Ireland Review*.)

YEARS ago, in the adventurous youth of his mind, Mr. O'Grady found the Gaelic tradition like a neglected antique dun with the doors barred, and there was little or no egress. Listening, he heard from within the hum of an immense chivalry, and he opened the doors and the wild riders went forth to work their will. Now he would recall them. But it is in vain. The wild riders have gone forth, and their labours in the human mind are only beginning. They will do their deeds over again, and now they will act through many men and speak through many voices. The spirit of Cuculain will stand at many a lonely place in the heart, and he will win as of old against multitudes. The children of Turann will start afresh still eager to take up and renew their cyclic labours, and they will gain, not for themselves, the Apples of the Tree of Life, and the Spear

of the Will, and the Fleece which is the immortal body. All the heroes and demigods returning will have a wider field than Erin for their deeds, and they will not grow weary warring upon things that die, but will be fighters in the spirit against immortal powers, and, as before, the acts will be sometimes noble and sometimes base. They cannot be stayed from their deeds, for they are still in the strength of a youth which is ever renewing itself. Nor for all the wrong which may be done should they be restrained. Mr. O'Grady would now have the tales kept from the crowd to be the poetic luxury of a few. Yet would we, for all the martyrs who perished in the fires of the Middle Ages, counsel the placing of the Gospels on the list of books to be read only by a few esoteric worshippers? The literature which should be unpublished is that which holds the secret of the magical powers. The legends of Ireland are not of this kind. They have no special message to the aristocrat more than to the man of the people. The men who made the literature of Ireland were by no means nobly born, and it was the bards who placed the heroes, each in his rank, and crowned them for after ages, and gave them their famous names. They have placed on the brow of others a crown which belonged to themselves, and all the heroic literature of the world was made by the sacrifice of the nameless kings of men who have given a

sceptre to others they never wielded while living, and who bestowed the powers of beauty and pity on women who perhaps had never uplifted a heart in their day, and who now sway us from the grave with a grace only imagined in the dreaming soul of the poet. Mr. O'Grady has been the bardic champion of the ancient Irish aristocracy. He has thrown on them the sunrise colours of his own brilliant spirit, and now would restrain others from the use of their names lest a new kingship should be established over them, and another law than that of his own will; lest the poets of the democracy looking back on the heroes of the past, should overcome them with the ideas of a later day, and the Atticottic nature find a loftier spirit in those who felt the unendurable pride of the Fianna and rose against it. Well, it is only natural he should try to protect the children of his thought, but they need no later word from him. If writers of a less noble mind than his deal with these things they will not rob his heroes of a single power to uplift or inspire. In Greece, after Æschylus and his stupendous deities, came Sophocles, who restrained them with a calm wisdom, and Euripides, who made them human, but still the mysterious Orphic deities remain and stir us when reading the earlier page. Mr. O'Grady would not have the Red Branch cycle cast in dramatic form or given to the people. They are too

great to be staged; and he quotes, mistaking the gigantic for the heroic, a story of Cuculain reeling round Ireland on his fairy steed the Liath Macha. This may be phantasy or extravagance, but it is not heroism. Cuculain is often heroic, but it is a quality of the soul and not of the body; it is shown by his tears over Ferdiad, in his gentleness to women. A more grandiose and heroic figure than Cuculain was seen on the Athenian stage; and no one will say that the Titan Prometheus, chained on the rock in his agelong suffering for men, is not a nobler figure than Cuculain in any aspect in which he appears to us in the tales. Divine traditions, the like of which were listened to with awe by the Athenians, should not be too lofty for our Christian people, whose morals Mr. O'Grady, here hardly candid, professes to be anxious about. What is great in literature is a greatness springing out of the human heart. Though we fall short to-day of the bodily stature of the giants of the prime, the spirit still remains and can express an equal greatness. I can well understand how a man of our own day, by the enlargement of his spirit, and the passion and sincerity of his speech, could express the greatness of the past. The drama in its mystical beginning was the vehicle through which divine ideas, which are beyond the sphere even of heroic life and passion, were expressed; and if the later Irish writers fail of

such greatness, it is not for that reason that the soul of Ireland will depart. I can hardly believe Mr. O'Grady to be serious when he fears that many forbidden subjects will be themes for dramatic art, that Maeve with her many husbands will walk the stage, and the lusts of an earlier age be revived to please the lusts of to-day. The danger of art is not in its subjects, but in the attitude of the artist's mind. The nobler influences of art arise, not because heroes are the theme, but because of noble treatment and the intuition which perceives the inflexible working out of great moral laws. The abysses of human nature may well be sounded if the plummet be dropped by a spirit from the heights. The lust which leads on to death may be a terrible thing to contemplate, but in the event there is consolation: and the eye of faith can see even in the very exultation of corruption how God the Regenerator is working His will, leading man onward to his destiny of inevitable beauty. Mr. O'Grady in his youth had the epic imagination, and I think few people realise how great and heroic that inspiration was; but the net that is spread for Leviathan will not capture all the creatures of the deep, and neither epic nor romance will manifest fully the power of the mythical ancestors of the modern Gael who now seek incarnation anew in the minds of their children. Men too often forget, in this age of printed books,

that literature is, after all, only an ineffectual record of speech. The literary man has gone into strange byeways through long contemplation of books, and he writes with elaboration what could never be spoken, and he loses that power of the bards on whom tongues of fire had descended, who were masters of the magic of utterance, whose thoughts were not meant to be silently absorbed from the lifeless page. For there never can be, while man lives in a body, a greater means of expression for him than the voice of man affords, and no instrument of music will ever rival in power the flowing of the music of the spheres through his lips. In all its tones, from the chanting of the magi which compelled the elements, to those gentle voices which guide the dying into peace, there is a power which will never be stricken from tympan or harp, for in all speech there is life, and with the greatest speech the deep tones of another Voice may mingle. Has not the Lord spoken through His prophets? And man, when he has returned to himself, and to the knowledge of himself, may find a greater power in his voice than those which he has painfully harnessed to perform his will, in steamship or railway. It is through drama alone that the writer can summon, even if vicariously, so great a power to his aid; and it is possible we yet may hear on the stage, not merely the mimicry of human speech, but the old for-

gotten music which was heard in the duns of kings, which made the revellers grow silent and great warriors to bow low their faces in their hands. Dear O'Grady, if we do not succeed it is not for you to blame us, for our aims are at least as high as your own.

ON AN IRISH HILL.

It has been my dream for many years that I might at some time dwell in a cabin on the hill-side in this dear and living land of ours, and there I would lay my head in the lap of a serene nature, and be on friendly terms with the winds and mountains who hold enough of unexplored mystery and infinitude to engage me at present. I would not dwell too far from men, for above an enchanted valley, only a morning's walk from the city, is the mountain of my dream. Here, between heaven and earth and my brothers, there might come on me some foretaste of the destiny which the great powers are shaping for us in this isle, the mingling of God and nature and man in a being, one, yet infinite in number. Old tradition has it that there was in our mysterious past such a union, a sympathy between man and the elements so complete, that at every great deed of hero or king the three swelling waves of Fohla responded: the wave of Toth, the wave of Rury, and the long, slow, white, foaming wave of Cleena. O mysterious kinsmen, would that to-day some deed great enough could call forth the thunder of your response once again! But perhaps he is now rocked in his cradle who will hereafter rock you into joyous foam.

The mountain which I praise has not hitherto been considered one of the sacred places in Eire, no glittering tradition hangs

about it as a lure; and indeed I would not have it considered as one in any special sense apart from its companions, but I take it here as a type of what any high place in nature may become for us if well loved; a haunt of deep peace, a spot where the Mother lays aside veil after veil, until at last the great Spirit seems in brooding gentleness to be in the boundless fields alone. I am not inspired by that brotherhood which does not overflow with love into the being of the elements, nor hail in them the same spirit as that which calls us with so many pathetic and loving voices from the lives of men. So I build my dream cabin in hope this wider intimacy:—

A cabin on the mountain side hid in a grassy nook,
Where door and windows open wide where friendly stars may look;
The rabbit shy can patter in; the winds may enter free
Who throng around the mountain throne in living ecstasy.

And when the sun sets dimmed in eve and purple fills the air,
I think the sacred Hazel Tree is dropping berries there
From starry fruitage waved aloft where Connla's well o'erflows:
For sure the immortal waters pour though every wind that blows.

I think when night towers up aloft and shakes
the trembling dew,
That every high and lonely thought that thrills
my being through
Is but a shining berry dropped down through the
purple air,
And from the magic tree of life the fruit falls
everywhere.

The Sacred Hazel was the Celtic branch of the tree of life; its scarlet nuts gave wisdom and inspiration; and fed on this ethereal fruit, the ancient Gael grew to greatness. Though to-day none eat of the fruit, or drink the purple flood welling from Connla's fountain, I think that the fire which still kindles the Celtic races was flashed into their blood in that magical time and is our heritage from the Druidic past. It is still here, the magic and mystery, it lingers in the heart of a people to whom their neighbours of another world are frequent visitors and a matter of course, with their own rights and place.

The earth here remembers her past, and to bring about its renewal she whispers with honeyed entreaty and lures with bewitching glamour. At this mountain I speak of it was that our greatest poet, the last and most beautiful voice of Eire, first found freedom in song, so he tells me: and it was the pleading for a return to herself that this mysterious nature first fluted through his lips:—

"Come away, O human child,
To the woods and waters wild,
With a faery hand in hand:
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand."

Away! yes, yes; to wander on and on under star-rich skies, ever getting deeper into the net, the love that will not let us rest, the peace above the desire of love. The village lights in heaven and earth, each with their own peculiar hint of home, draw us hither and thither, where it matters not, so the voice calls and the heart-light burns. Some it leads to the crowded ways; some it draws apart: and the Light knows, and not any other, the need and the way.

If you ask me what has the mountain to do with these inspirations, and whether the singer would not anywhere out of his own soul have made an equal song, I answer to the latter, I think not. In these lofty places the barriers between the sphere of light and the sphere of darkness are fragile, and the continual ecstasy of the high air communicates itself, and I have also heard from others many tales of things seen and heard here which show that the races of the Sidhe are often present. Some have seen below the mountain a blazing heart of light, others have heard the musical beating of a heart, or faery bells, or ærial clashings, and the heart-beings have also spoken; so it has

gathered around itself its own traditions of spiritual romance and adventures of the soul.

Let no one call us dreamers when the mind is awake. If we grew forgetful and felt no more the bitter human struggle—yes. But if we bring to it the hope and courage of those who are assured of the nearby presence and encircling love of the great powers? I would hale to my mountain the weary spirits who are obscured in the fœtid city where life decays into rottenness; and call thither those who are in doubt, the pitiful and trembling hearts who are sceptic of any hope, and place them where the dusky vapours of their thought might dissolve in the inner light, and their doubts vanish on the mountain top where the earth-breath streams away to the vast, when the night glows like a seraph, and the spirit is beset by the evidence of a million of suns to the grandeur of the nature wherein it lives and whose destiny must be its also.

After all, is not this longing but a search for ourselves, and where shall we find ourselves at last? Not in this land nor wrapped in these garments of an hour, but wearing the robes of space whither these voices out of the illimitable allure us, now with love, and anon with beauty or power. In our past the mighty ones came glittering across the foam of the mystic waters and brought their warriors away.

Perhaps, and this also is my hope, they may

again return; Manannan, on his ocean-sweeping boat, a living creature, diamond-winged, or Lu, bright as the dawn, on his fiery steed, manned with tumultuous flame, or some hitherto unknown divinity may stand suddenly by me on the hill, and hold out the Silver Branch with white blossoms from the Land of Youth, and stay me ere I depart with the sung call as of old:—

Tarry thou yet, late lingerer in the twilight's glory;
Gay are the hills with song: earth's faery children leave
More dim abodes to roam the primrose-hearted eve,
Opening their glimmering lips to breathe some wondrous story.
Hush, not a whisper! Let your heart alone go dreaming.
Dream unto dream may pass: deep in the heart alone
Murmurs the Mighty One his solemn undertone.
Canst thou not see adown the silver cloudland streaming
Rivers of faery light, dewdrop on dewdrop falling,
Starfire of silver flames, lighting the dark beneath?
And what enraptured hosts burn on the dusky heath!

Come thou away with them for Heaven to
Earth is calling.
These are Earth's voice—her answer—spirits
thronging.
Come to the Land of Youth : the trees grown
heavy there
Drop on the purple wave the starry fruit they
bear.
Drink ! the immortal waters quench the spirit's
longing.
Art thou not now, bright one, all sorrow past,
in elation,
Filled with wild joy, grown brother-hearted
with the vast,
Whither thy spirit wending flits the dim stars
past
Unto the Light of Lights in burning adoration.

THE POET OF SHADOWS. . .

WHEN I was asked to write "anything" about Yeats, our Irish poet, my thoughts were like rambling flocks that have no shepherd, and without guidance my rambling thoughts have run anywhere.

I confess I have feared to enter or linger too long in the many-coloured land of Druid twilights and tunes. A beauty not our own, more perfect than we can ourselves conceive, is a danger to the imagination. I am too often tempted to wander with Usheen in Tir-na-nOge and to forget my own heart and its more rarely accorded vision of truth. I know I like my own heart best, but I never look into the world of my friend without feeling that my region lies in the temperate zone and is near the Arctic circle; the flowers grow more rarely and are paler, and the struggle for existence is keener. Southward and in the warm west are the Happy Isles among the Shadowy Waters. The pearly phantoms are dancing there with blown hair amid cloud-frail daffodils. They have known nothing but beauty, or at the most a beautiful unhappiness. Everything there moves in procession or according to ritual, and the agony of grief, if it is felt, must be concealed. There are no faces blurred with tears there; some traditional gesture signifying sorrow is all that is allowed. I have looked with longing eyes into this world. It is Ildathach, the Many-Coloured

Land, but not the Land of the Living Heart. That island where the multitudinous beatings of many hearts became one is yet unvisited; but the isle of our poet is the most beautiful of all the isles the mystic voyagers have found during the thousands of years literature has recorded in Ireland. What wonder that many wish to follow him, and already other voices are singing amid its twilights.

They will make and unmake. They will discover new wonders; and will perhaps make commonplace some beauty which but for repetition would have seemed rare. I would that no one but the first discoverer should enter Ildathach, or at least report of it. No voyage to the new world, however memorable, will hold us like the voyage of Columbus. I sigh sometimes thinking on the light dominion dreams have over the heart. We cannot hold a dream for long, and that early joy of the poet in his new-found world has passed. It has seemed to him too luxuriant. He seeks for something more, and has tried to make its tropical tangle orthodox; and the glimmering waters and winds are no longer beautiful natural presences, but have become symbolic voices and preach obscurely some doctrine of their power to quench the light in the soul or to fan it to a brighter flame. I like their old voiceless motion and their natural wandering best, and would rather roam in the bee-loud glade than under the boughs of beryl and

chrysoberyl, where I am put to school to learn the significance of every jewel. I like that natural infinity which a prodigal beauty suggests more than that revealed in esoteric hieroglyphs, even though the writing be in precious stones. Sometimes I wonder whether that insatiable desire of the mind for something more than it has yet attained, which blows the perfume from every flower, and plucks the flower from every tree, and hews down every tree in the valley until it goes forth gnawing itself in a last hunger, does not threaten all the cloudy turrets of the poet's soul. But whatever end or transformation or unveiling may happen, that which creates beauty must have beauty in its essence, and the soul must cast off many vestures before it comes to itself. We, all of us, poets, artists, and musicians, who work in shadows, must sometime begin to work in substance, and why should we grieve if one labour ends and another begins? I am interested more in life than in the shadows of life, and as Ildathach grows fainter I await eagerly the revelation of the real nature of one who has built so many mansions in the heavens. The poet has concealed himself under the embroidered cloths and has moved in secretness, and only at rare times, as when he says "A pity beyond all telling is hid in the heart of love," do we find a love which is not the love of the Sidhe; and more rarely still do recognizable human figures,

like the Old Pensioner or Moll Magee, meet us. All the rest are from another world and are survivals of the proud and golden races who move with the old stateliness and an added sorrow for the dark age which breaks in upon their loveliness. They do not war upon the new age, but build up about themselves in imagination the ancient beauty, and love with a love a little coloured by the passion of the darkness from which they could not escape. They are the sole inheritors of many traditions, and have now come to the end of the ways, and so are unhappy. We know why they are unhappy, but not the cause of a strange merriment which sometimes they feel, unless it be that beauty within itself has a joy in its own rhythmic being. They are changing, too, as the winds and waters have changed. They are not like Usheen, seekers and romantic wanderers, but have each found some mood in themselves where all quest ceases; they utter oracles; and even in the swaying of a hand or the dropping of hair there is less suggestion of individual action than of a divinity living within them, shaping an elaborate beauty in dream for his own delight, and for no other end than the delight in his dream. Other poets have written of Wisdom overshadowing man and speaking through his lips, or a Will working within the human will, but I think in this poetry we find for the first time the revelation of the Spirit as the weaver

of beauty. Hence it comes that little hitherto unnoticed motions are adored:

"*You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,*
And bind up your long hair and sigh;
And all men's hearts must burn and beat."

This woman is less the beloved than the priestess of beauty who reveals the divinity, not as the inspired prophetesses filled with the Holy Breath did in the ancient mysteries, but in casual gestures and in a waving of her white arms, in the stillness of her eyes, in her hair which trembles like a faery flood of unloosed shadowy light over pale breasts, and in many glimmering motions so beautiful that it is at once seen whose footfall it is we hear, and that the place where she stands is holy ground. This, it seems to me, is what is essential in this poetry, what is peculiar and individual in it—the revelation of great mysteries in unnoticed things; and as not a sparrow may fall unconsidered by Him, so even in the swaying of a human hand His sceptre may have dominion over the heart and His paradise be entered in the lifting of an eyelid.

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